

## RELIGION AND SOCIAL POLICY

173

directions were issued to the justices of five midland counties to remove all enclosures made in the last five years, on the ground that they resulted in depopulation and were particularly harmful in times of dearth. In 1632, 1635, and 1636, three Commissions were appointed and special instructions against enclosure were issued to the Justices of Assize. In parts of the country, at any rate, land which had been laid down to grass was ploughed up in obedience to the Government's orders. In the four years from 1635 to 1638 a list of some 600 offenders was returned to the Council, and about £50,000 was imposed upon them in fines.\*<sup>8</sup> With this policy Laud was whole-heartedly in sympathy. A letter in his private correspondence, in which he expresses his detestation of enclosure, reveals the temper which evoked Clarendon's gentle complaint that the archbishop made himself unpopular by his inclination "a little too much to the countenance the Commission for Depopulation."<sup>6</sup>\* Laud was himself an active member of the Commission, and dismissed with impatient contempt the squirearchy's appeal to the common law. In the day of his ruin he was reminded by his enemies of the needlessly sharp censures with which he barbed the fine imposed upon an enclosing

landlord.<sup>70</sup>

The prevention of enclosure and depopulation was merely one element in a general policy, by which a benevolent Government, unhampered by what Laud had called "that noise" of parliamentary debate, was to endeavour by even-handed pressure to enforce social obligations on great and small, and to prevent the public interest being sacrificed to an unconscionable appetite for private gain. The preoccupation of the Council with the problem of securing adequate food supplies and reasonable prices, with poor relief, and, to a lesser degree, with questions of wages, has been described by Miss Leonard, and its attempts to protect craftsmen against exploitation at the hands